

Sudden Death

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This past year I lost two people very close to me, both of them died suddenly. We live in an uncertain world and we foolishly believe we have all the time in the world. Some of you listening to the sound of my voice may be in perfect health today but you have no idea what tomorrow could bring. Perhaps bad news from a medical report or you could be struck down from a sudden disorder. We live in a dangerous society that grows more violent with each new day. You could be gunned down while you're going about your normal duties of your day. Look at the victims in the terror attack on 9/11, they were on their way to work on a sunny day. Everything seemed quite normal until they climbed on the wrong plane or took the elevator up to the wrong building and that plane and building was their prison of sudden death.

Sudden is all around you and you would be quite alarmed if you knew how close you were each day to dying, yet you think you have all the time in the world. But the Bible declares in the book of Ecclesiastes, "For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." Did you hear those words? When it falleth suddenly upon them?

I was in a hotel in Edinburgh, Scotland and I stepped into the shower but I didn't know that that bathroom was a death-trap. The tub had just been waxed and as I stepped onto that slick surface, my feet began to spin and spin and there was nothing for me to hold onto and I was flipped upside down and I landed out of the shower on my head and hand on a hard concrete floor. I broke my wrist that day but I could have broken my head and died quite suddenly and unexpectedly. My foot slid in due time.

Listen friend, you have no guarantee of tomorrow. This message is a wake-up call and a warning to live each day for eternity and to get your house in order for you face an eternity that you could enter at any moment and quite unexpectedly. My message this evening is entitled "Sudden Death" and I preach it with a heavy heart that there may be some within the sound of my voice who may be gone this time next year through death.

I recall Adrian Rodgers telling a story about how he was at a funeral and while at the funeral he met a fellow pastor he'd not seen in a while and they chatted about the deceased and his untimely death. Adrian Rodgers said the very next month, that pastor he was chatting with died suddenly and not even a year after Adrian Rodger told that story,

he himself was dead and gone. My two childhood friends both died young in car accidents. They had their whole life ahead of them but they were suddenly removed from this world. God can stop your heart right now, friend, and call your spirit back to him.

We see a picture of a funeral procession found in the book of Ecclesiastes in chapter 12. Listen to how it describes a day coming for every single one of us,

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”

Those vivid descriptions given by King Solomon, speak of a person getting closer to their grave: the hearing falters, the eyesight grows dim, the hair gets gray, the nervous system goes to pieces, your courage fails you and you become old and frail and fearful and then finally the silver cord is loosed and your soul goes back to the God who gave it to decide where you will spend eternity, whether in his presence of perfect peace and bliss or away from his presence in a burning and agonizing region called hell. Either way, the day comes like a freight train coming down the track and there is no stopping it until it arrives.

The day of your death is approaching, friend, and it may come sooner than you realize. How you live your life now matters for eternity.

“Only one life, ‘twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.
And as I lay dying, how good it shall be,
If the lamp of my life has been burned out for thee.”

Those are the words of C. T. Studd and he knew what he was talking about.

O friends, our lives not burned out for the pleasures of this perishing world, not burned out for sin and selfishness, not burned out for temporal pleasures and a waning sun but burned out for the Lord Jesus Christ and what matters for eternity. Listen friends, it’s

been estimated that 83 people a minute die apart from Christ and drop into the regions of hell. Do the math. That comes to almost 5,000 people an hour. Every day 120,000 persons fall into hell and it's terrors. That's over 800,000 a week every month and that adds up to 3.3 million people falling into the prison of hell. Through the course of a year 40 million new people populate the regions of hell. Let ten years go by and another 400 million souls are shut up in there to scream in agony. Now, think back in your mind of how all the generations since the time of Adam and all the hordes of people who have died apart from Christ and occupy hell right this moment. Hell crowds every day with new arrivals.

How we spend our time on this earth matters for eternity. Do we waste our time on this world's amusements and entertainments? Or are we occupied in bringing others to Jesus? That's all that really matters. Are you bringing others to Jesus, friend? Are you pointing others to Jesus or are you saved and silent? Do you not have a witness for Christ and what he has done for you? Are you so occupied with this world and your family that you have no time to warn others to flee from the wrath to come? That a burning hell awaits every single person who dies in their sins without a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ?

What if you died quite suddenly and you regretted all the time you wasted in this world while you had breath within you to do good for the Lord? What if you died quite suddenly and you, yourself, woke up in hell and you grew greatly alarmed because you thought you were saved? Are you savingly united to a living Lord through a vital faith? Are you born again? Or are you just a textual decisionist who made a decision to become a Christian based on a Bible text? Have you ever been awakened to your lost condition? Have you ever been convicted of sin? Do you know what being truly converted means? Do you serve the Lord Jesus Christ in a life of holiness? Or do you serve yourself? Who is seated on the throne of your life? You or Christ?

Listen friends, when we come to Christ, we take him as Lord. Self is dethroned and another is enthroned there, the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot divide Christ into two halves, Savior and Lord, and taken the one that suits you and leave the other alone. Do you have a living faith? Do you know that you're sins have been forgiven? You could be removed from this earth quite suddenly and enter an eternity you are quite unprepared for.

I remember going through the home of Sam Jones, the great Methodist Preacher, who was mightily used of God in the 19th century. His home is in Cartersfield, Georgia. Revival broke out under Same Jones's preaching to such a degree in the city of Nashville that tens of thousands came savingly to Christ. A drunken sea captain by the name of Ryman was saved in one of those meetings. He gave his life to Christ and built an auditorium in downtown Nashville for Sam Jones to preach in. It's called Ryman Auditorium. You probably know it as the Grand Ole Opry but that building was built for Sam Jones to preach in, not Johnny Cash to sing in.

Well, Same Jones was preaching in the city, Oklahoma, to a men's meeting at a church one time and his sermon title was "Sudden Death." He made the comment to them that

dark night, “Men of Oklahoma, look out,” he warned, “before my voice has died out in your ears. There will be deaths following this meeting that will shock this city, shock this state and maybe even this nation.” Later that evening, Sam Jones boarded a train to head back to Georgia and while on that train, he began to feel ill and his face went suddenly pale. He asked for some hot water to drink and as soon as he took a sip, he fell over dead. It was as if his own death was an exclamation point to his sermon on sudden death.

I speak to you here tonight to take warning to get your spiritual house in order. You face an eternity that will come sooner than you realize. You may enter that eternity within the year. What you have done with your life will make all the difference in how you spend that eternity.

I used to have a business partner and he told me one day he wanted his tombstone to read: Win. Win. Win. I went home that day and told my wife what he said and then I said, “Do you know what I want on my tombstone? Only one life, ‘twill soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.” And that’s true, friends, we are told in the word of God to redeem the time because the days are evil. Are the days evil? Are you redeeming the time for the Lord? Or are you wasting time on gratifying your flesh? Are you living a selfless life in light of eternity? Or are you living selfishly for this present world? You will eventually die and your soul will go back to the God who gave it and he will determine where and how you spend that eternity. You will have no say-so then. You will not be in charge then. You will have no rights then.

We have to get our priorities straight. Perhaps you are a young person and you have not been living for the Lord and you need to get back into a right relationship with him. Maybe you are a homemaker but lately you’ve been too much like Martha, preoccupied with many things and you need to be more like Mary, concerned with the one thing needful.

We must be readjusting ourselves to live our lives in light of eternity, friends. You’ve been bought with a price and that price was the Savior’s blood. You’ve not been redeemed with pretty baubles like silver and gold but by way of a bloody cross. Your life is not your own. Your time is not your own. Your money is not your own. Your body is not your own. Christ must be a complete Master.

What does the Apostle Paul say in regard to this? He says two important things regarding this in 2 Corinthians: first he declares, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that everyone may receive the things done in his body according to that he hath done whether it be good or bad.” Then, further along in the same chapter, I believe chapter 5, he states, “And that he died for all, that they which live should live selfishly for themselves thinking only of their own pleasures and self-gratification.” Does he say that? No. He says, “And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”

Let me ask you something: does that describe your life, friend? Or are you living for yourself in this world? Be honest. Even if you are a pastor, be honest, Brother Pastor. Are

you building a kingdom here on earth for yourself by growing your church and an empire? Or are you caught on the grow mentality and all you want to do is get bodies in the seats in your sanctuary so you can expand your campus? Listen, if our eyes are not glued to eternity, we can even deceive ourselves in ministry.

Are you a businessman who claims to be a Christian? Perhaps you are a deacon or an elder in your church? Are you really living for God with the Lord Jesus Christ ruling on the throne of your life? Or do you sit there and rule and ask God to bless what you do in his name? Perhaps your priorities are all wrong and you love your money more than you admit. Covetousness will send you to hell, did you know that? The rich young ruler was an honest man, at least he didn't go and join the church and serve as a deacon. Rather, he just hugged his possessions all the way to hell but they got burned up when he got there but he didn't have Christ. Do you?

Sudden death may suddenly separate you and your wealth and where would you be? If you were truly born again and your priorities were wrong on this earth and you die, what then? What will you do at the Judgment Seat of Christ as he sits there as a refining fire with eyes of fire? Will your life, friend, be gold, silver and precious stones reflecting the brilliance of a life spent on the full stretch for Christ? Or will your life be more like wood, hay and stubble and you bend over and scoop up the ashes of a wasted life and then press them into his nail pierced hands?

“Only one life, ‘twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Go to God, friend, and ask him who has eyes of fire, to shine the searching spotlight of the Holy Ghost upon your life while you've got breath in your body and the energy to live for God in eternity. Ask the lover of your soul to stir afresh in you a deeper love for him. Ask the Lord to give you the grace to be all he knows you can be. Go to him now, friend, and ask him to re-ignite your passion for him. Go to him now.